

The Confessor's Tongue for January 3, 2010

Sunday Before Theophany; Prophet Malachi, Marty Gordius, St. Genevieve

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

January 6: The Holy Theophany of Our Lord

Luminous was the feast which hath passed [Nativity], yet even more glorious is this present day; for on the former the magi worshipped the Savior, but on this a glorious servant hath baptized the Master. Then the shepherds, piping, beheld and marvelled; but now, the voice of the Father hath proclaimed the only-begotten Son.
Vespers Aposticha for January 2

The feast of the Baptism of our Lord is also called the *Theophany* or *Epiphany* (*Manifestation of God, Manifestation from above*), because at the baptism of Jesus Christ, the Trinity was present and manifested: the Son of God received baptism in the Jordan River; God the Father testified to His Son by a voice from Heaven; and the Holy Spirit, appearing in the form of a dove, confirmed the words of God the Father. In ancient times, the catechumens used to receive the Sacrament of Baptism on the vigil of this day, whence it also received the name of "Feast of Illumination."

The special feature of the Feast of Theophany is "the consecration of the waters." In all churches it takes place on the eve of the feast, after the Liturgy or Vespers. In some churches, it is repeated on the day of the Feast after Liturgy, on rivers and lakes, whither the clergy go in procession, with cross and banners. The first consecration is retained as a reminder of the baptism which catechumens used to receive on this day, and of the vows which we ourselves took at our own baptism. The second consecration takes place in memory of the Baptism of Our Lord; hence the procession is called "going to Jordan."

Theophany is indeed a great feast. Liturgically it renews the joy of Christmas, shows us the incarnate God in a new light, and deepens our appreciation of the Incarnation itself. It is, in fact, so much like another Christmas that even the services are similar. As Christmas is the manifestation of the boundless love of God for man, so Theophany is the great revelation of the divinity of our Lord. The two feasts thus supplement one another. Theophany proclaims that the little Child of Bethlehem is really God, pointing from earth to heaven. Christmas, on the other hand, tells us that God became for us a little Child, tracing His descent from heaven to earth. Where at Christmas only shepherds saw that the Word was made flesh, at Theophany the voice of God the Father summons the whole world to adore Jesus. The faithful do well to participate as fully as possible in the cycle of services for the feast.

We celebrate Theophany through its leavetaking on January 14. We use the troparion and kontakion of the Feast in our daily prayers and at meals in place of the usual "Our Father" and "We give thanks..."

Theophany, Troparion, tone 1

When Thou, O Lord wast baptized in the Jordan / the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. / For the voice

of the Father bare witness to Thee, / naming Thee His beloved Son. / And the Spirit, in the form of dove, / confirmed the certainty of that word. / O Christ our God, who hast manifested Thyself and enlightened the world // glory to Thee.

Theophany, Kontakion, tone 4

Today Thou hast appeared to the universe / and Thy Light, O Lord, hath shone on us, / who with understanding praise Thee: / Thou hast come and revealed Thyself, // O Light unapproachable!

On the Use of Holy Water

Christ through His Baptism has sanctified the nature of water. For this reason, on the Eve of the Feast, after the blessing of the water, we take some home and keep it throughout the year, making regular use of it. The day of sanctifying the waters becomes a clear sign of God's grace, for the nature of these waters is not spoiled for a long time, but it endures for a whole year or two, or three, or many years. Today the waters that are drawn remain fresh and new and after an extended time is as on the day in which it was drawn.

By pious custom, the blessed waters of Theophany are taken home after the Great Blessing of Waters for the spiritual refreshment of soul and body and the sanctification of our dwellings. The water is drunk every day from the Feast (Jan 6) through its leavetaking (Jan 14). At other times, when we cannot come to church, or when we feel ill, are embarking upon a journey, are especially tempted, etc., we should resort to these blessed waters, partaking of them with prayer and deep faith.

Holy Water is kept in the church throughout the year for the faithful to take home as needed.

Old Holy Water may be disposed of by pouring it out on plants. It should not be poured down the drain.

Irreconcilable Differences

Fr. Richard Rene

The title phrase is probably the most often cited reason for modern cases of divorce. It refers to a situation in which two married people discover at some point along the road that they are "not compatible," which means, they don't get along emotionally, spiritually, physically, most of the time.

Let's get something straight to being with. The Eastern Orthodox Church does permit divorce under circumstances of adultery, abuse, and abandonment. However, divorce on the grounds of "irreconcilable differences" is generally not admissible in marriages between Orthodox Christians.

Why not? I believe it has something to do with the Church's rejection of the underlying secular assumption behind divorce due to "irreconcilable differences." Our culture tends to think of a successful marriage as one in which husband and wife are actually twin souls in different biological clothing.

Your “one true love” [or “soulmate”] is that special person who matches you perfectly, who completes you, fulfills you, perfects you, is actually your “other half” and so on.

The Christian understanding of marriage takes a very different view. In chapter five of his Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul uses a marital image to speak of the mystery of the Incarnation. The wife’s feminine role represents the human nature of Christ, which continues to manifest itself in the Church. (Ephesians 5:22-23) The husband’s masculine role, on the other hand, represents the divine nature of Christ the Son and Word of God, who is the head of the Church through the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 5:25-26) The union of the two genders in one relationship speaks of the one Person of Christ in whom two natures are united. And this union, St. Paul says, is a “great mystery” (Ephesians 5:32) precisely because those natures—the divine and the human—are so completely exclusive and irreconcilable!

What we have here is more than just a theological conundrum. It has real and profound implications for those of who are married and follow the Christian teaching. For one thing, St. Paul tells us that marriage naturally and necessarily exists within a framework of irreconcilable differences. By using husband and wife as an analogy of divine and human, St. Paul in fact shows that far from being twin souls or complementary beings, the genders in marriage are exclusively different.

This fundamental difference is more than just an unfortunate condition of life in a fallen world. It is the very basis of God’s providential love for us. The Gospel definition of love is that God gave Himself for that which is completely ‘other’ than Himself—humanity. And since we are made in the image and likeness of God, our definition of love is expressed in the same way: love is the giving of oneself to and for someone who is utterly different from us.

Inevitably, couples living the secular myth of the ‘twin souls’ or the ‘one true love’ finally discover that they really are two different people. When this happens, the result may well be divorce because they can’t or won’t reconcile the dissimilarities. For couples operating on the assumptions of the Gospel teaching, however, irreconcilable differences in a relationship are not the end, but the very beginning of their calling to show forth the mystery of Christ in their marriage.

When I strive to serve my wife in the absence of personal comfort, convenience, or emotional fulfillment, that act is nothing less than the enactment of the love of Christ “who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:6-8)

When I seek the good and the life of another when there is nothing in it for me—no completion,

no needs met, no emotional climax given—then my love is truly selfless, and as such, truly divine. And the greater the differences between myself and my wife, the brighter Christ shines when we continue to love one another anyway.

Are there any circumstances in which irreconcilable differences can genuinely be cited as the basis for a divorce? Possibly, but I believe that truly irreconcilable relationships are much rarer than we suppose. In a narcissistic, self-gratifying culture, we too easily flee from conflict with others. We try to smooth them over, rationalize them away, ignore them, or simply flee from them. Instead, we should see such disparities for what they really are: the canvas upon which we can illustrate the life-giving marriage between us and our Creator, which was consummated in the first century A.D. on a hill outside Jerusalem, and will be lived out in eternity.

January Namedays

- 1 Basil Geoff Stevenson, Basil Birthisel
- 10 Richard Gregory Joines (St. Gregory of Nyssa)
- 12 Tatiana Garner; Tatiana Tabet (Martyr Tatiana)
- 14 Nina Johnston, Nina Sylantyeva (St. Nina of Georgia, Equal to the Apostles)
- 17 Subdn Anthony Stokes (St. Anthony the Great)

January Birthdays

- 3 Ben Lyda
- 4 Sandra Pascale
- 9 Isabel Stone, Daniel Birthisel
- 20 Dianna Rivas
- 21 Katherine Frederick
- 24 Erica Rivas, Christopher Jones

Upcoming Events 2010

- 5-6 January: Holy Theophany and Houseblessings: Vigil 7:00 p.m., Divine Liturgy 8:00 a.m.
- 20-21 January: Feast of St. Maximus Vigil 7:00 p.m., Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.
- 23 January, 2010, North Texas Orthodox Mission (NTOM) Pre-Lenten Retreat at Holy Trinity with Fr. Joseph Honeycutt, 8:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- 29 January, Friday: Open House at Rectory, 6:00 p.m.
- 6-7 February: Elder Zacharias of St. John’s Monastery, Essex, England at St. Serapim’s & Sava’s: Saturday morning at St Serapim’s 7:00 Liturgy, 9:30 Talk with Q&A; St. Sava’s 5:00 p.m. Vespers, 6:00 Talk with Youth. Highly recommended!
- 13 February 2010, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers, Great Lent Begins. If you attend this parish, you should plan on attending this service.
- 26-27 February 2010 Metropolitan Jonah visits.
- 4 April 2010, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!